

## Preservation of *Kathiawari* folk literature and arts

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*Kathiawar*, known as Saurashtra region in Gujarat, is rich in its cultural heritage of folk arts and literature. The folk dances of *Kathiawar* like *dandiya raas*, *garba*, etc. folk music like *bhajans*, *dohas*, etc, litterateurs like Zaverchand Meghani, Narsinh Mehta, Bhoja Bhagat, Dulabhai Kag, etc. have occupied a prominent place in the world of folk arts and literature. The tales and poems are still enjoyed by people, when presented by folk artists in *Lok Dayora* (a gathering where people are entertained by folk artists). Even *Bhavais* (street plays) are performed telling them the stories of our great epics; today these street plays are performed to awaken citizens with their rights. This folk heritage is now moving towards extinction as today our youths are drawn towards western culture and arts. There is an urgent need for preservation of dying *Kathiawari* art forms and literature. Special care should be taken for the upliftment of the folk artists.

**Keywords:** Extinction, Prevention, Folk art & literature

Kathiawar, officially known as Saurashtra, was named after the *Kathi* community, who ruled for long in this region. Kathiawar, on the West of peninsular India lies between 20° 40' to 23° 25' North latitude and 69° 5' to 72°20' East longitudes. On the South-western direction of Kathiawar lies Arabian Sea on the North-western direction lies Bay of Kutch and on the eastern direction lies the Bay of Khambhat, these two gulfs enter the dry deserts of Kutch and Khambhat, coincides each other and separates Kathiawar from Gujarat, and is connected to Gujarat only by a small chunk of land on the Northeast direction. Kathiawar was divided in four different regions namely, Zalawad, Halar, Sorath and Gohilwad. Kathiawar has unique cultural heritage of folk arts and literature such as folk dance, drama, and music<sup>1</sup>. But unfortunately it is slowly moving towards extinction for want of proper patronage<sup>2-4</sup>.

### Folk literature

It is a collection of songs, poems, tales passed from generation to generation; it includes fairy tales, myths, legends, fables, tall tales and other oral traditions of preliterate society. During poet Rabindranath Tagore's last illness, Zaverchand Meghani a leading exponent of folk literature of Kathiawar was on a visit of Shantiniketan where he was allowed to have *darshan* of the ailing poet. Gurudev was overwhelmed by the folk songs presented by Meghani. The appreciation shown by no lesser a person than Gurudev, Tagore speaks volumes for high quality of

richness and life force of folk literature of Kathiawar. The rich tradition of folk literature of Kathiawar is reflected by the following couplet, which exhorts the mother to give birth only to the *Bhakt* – (saints or devotees), the brave or the *data*, who gives without reserve or remain barren and not to uselessly waste her health giving birth to useless infants:

*Janani Jan to Bhakt Jan, Kan Data kan Sur !  
Nahitar Raheje Vanjani, Mat Gumavis Noor !!*

The folk literature of Kathiawar abounds in stories of love, sacrifice of outlaws fighting for justice, the brave for help and protection of the weak and saints and their playful and ascetic *sadhana* and prayers rendered in devotional form. The folk writers and singers have depicted them in various forms. Rural women poets and writers have also contributed notably to this writings in prose and poetry. Most of the authors of folk literature have remained anonymous due to their selflessness. Kathiawar produced 15<sup>th</sup> century poet saint Narsinh Mehta whose devotional songs have formed part of daily early morning and evening common recitals of village people. Folk literature of Kathiawar also includes devotional songs of saints and *sadhus* like saint Rohidas (a *dalit* saint), Bhoja Bhagat (a farmer saint), Morar Saheb, Das Jivan and Muslim Sufi saint Rajab Khan, and others. There were also women poet saints like Gangasati, Liribai and Bhaktkavi Mirabai, whose bhajans still verberate and reverberate in the hearts of the people.

Among the modern folk poets, whose songs echo heartbeats of rural people and love for motherland is Javerchand Meghani. Meghani besides writing inspiring poems has done extraordinary work of singing and collecting valuable folk literature moving from place to place in rural Kathiawar. Another outstanding modern poet is Dulabhai Kag popularly known as *Bhagat bapu*. Among other folk artists that presented *Lok Sahitya* in assembly of thousands of people called *Lok Dayro* are Gadhavi Meghanand, Merubha, Bhikhudan Gadhavi and others. Story telling by Kanji Butta Barot was highly enjoyed by people. *Lok Dayaras* are common events, where folk artists present folk literature. Most wonderful and interesting part of folk literature consists of inspiring and divine songs mostly sung by unknown rustic poets, whose echo always continue to verberate and reverberate rural Kathiawar. The love songs of *Radha* and *Krishna* in form of *Garbo*, *Garbi*, *Raasda* during *Navratri festival* reveal the heart of village culture. *Prabhatiya* is a form of folk songs and are also important part of folk literature. *Charni* songs consisting of songs of seasons, ballads and heroic songs is an enjoyable folk form. *Sorathi Duhas* and *Chhaands* form important part of folk literature and are sung in *Lok melas*. Folk literature is the representation of feelings and emotions of the throbbing folk hearts in the same lot, the common theme ever lively and always abounding<sup>1-4</sup>.

### Folk dances

Dance that originates among the common people of a region is developed without choreographer and reflects the traditional life of the common people of a particular region. Folk dances of Kathiawar are full of varieties coupled with folk songs and folk instruments. They are based on and connected with folk festivals and religious traditions since ancient times and it could now be considered as cultural folk art and heritage. Folk dances differ from region to region<sup>1-4</sup>.

#### *Tippani*

*Tippani* dance form is a fatigue removing dance belongs to *Koli* women of Chorwad region of Kathiawar. *Tippani* is performed by ladies with the help of equipment having square wood or iron piece at one end of a long stick, which was used for beating and pressing *lime (chuno)* into the foundation of a house under construction. Each of the women would have a *tippani* and would dance in two rows opposite

to each other, and would sing supported by musical instruments. Voluptuousness, gaiety, pathos, and rapture may be observed in *tippani dance*<sup>1</sup>.

#### *Raas and raasda*

Men play *raas*, where element of dance is eminent in *raas*. Varieties, vigour and force are observed in *raas*. It has the element of *gopculture*. *Gopas* and *Gopis* together play *Krishna Lila raas*. Subsequently, all the tribes have imbibed their own ideas or talents in the *raas*. Among all these *raas*, *Dandiya raas* of Kathiawar is eye catching. Generally, men play *dandiya raas*, but it has also become popular among women. *Koli*, *Ayer*, *Mer*, *Kanbi* and *Rajput* of Kathiawar have mastered this art form. In *dandiya raas* of Bharwad and Rabari folk, mostly songs are absent, but *raas* is played with music of *dhol* and *shernai* in *Hinchtaal*. *Mer* community dancers play *dandiya raas* speedily with stamping the ground.

#### *Athango raas*

Also known as *gofgunthan*, is a popular dance of *Koli* and *Kanbi* community. It is charming and amusing form of a dance in which strings of varied colours are tied to a ring hanged at the ceiling. The other end of the string is handed over to each of the dancers who begin with *Garbi*, than play *dandiya raas*. During the *raas*, several modes such as *bethak*, *fudadai*, *tappa* are played and then each one plays alternately in which one coming out and the other go in the circle. The strings first get knitted and then release with reverse movements. This dance form has ceased to exist<sup>1</sup>.

#### *Garba and garbi*

*Garba* is a popular dance form connected with *Shaktipujan*. *Garbo* means an earthen pot with small holes around it, and the lamp lit within indicates continuity of life. During *Navratri* nights in village streets women play *Garba* in circle around the idol of the deity. *Garbas* are the prayers in praise and devotion to *Mataji*. Musical instruments are not much used. *Garbi* is one of the kinds of *raas* sung by men only. Men sing and dance rhythmically in measured steps around *Garbi* – *Mandavadi*, being established as deity - the Goddess<sup>1-3</sup>.

#### *Daka and hoda raas*

The *Bharwad* community of Kathiawar plays these types of *raas*. Today, this dance form is almost extinct and is played in very few areas of the community. Songs of *Krishna* and *Gopi* have place of prime importance as theme in *Hoda raas*. In this dance, *Bharwad* men and women both participate in pairs. Each pair opposite to other in which one gives *tali* (clap) to the opposite partner and each one's legs

gives *theka* to the ground producing uniform sound of steps and *tali* of hands. This type of dance form is rarely seen today and has started vanishing along with the *Bharwad community*<sup>1</sup>.

#### **Dhamal raas**

*Dhamal raas* reminds us of primitive culture of Africa. The *Siddis* are believed to be the semi nomadic tribe. The *Siddis* habitating in Gir forest of Kathiawar performs it with original wildness and vigour. *Dholki*, big *dhol* is used as musical instrument. This dance form is now popular throughout the country<sup>1-2</sup>.

#### **Folk music**

Folk music is the music by and for the common people. It is kind of music originating from the ordinary people of a region or nation and continued by oral tradition. It is typically anonymous music that is an expression of the life of people in a community. Though the folk music is not classical it has its own rhythm, cadence, musical notation, etc. Singing in folk life is the natural outcome of their daily life, its living and varieties of modes, *Halardu* (lullaby), *Marasiya* (dirge/elegy), *Duha*, songs, and *bhajans*. The folk instruments used for folk music are *Dokod*, *Zanz*, *Khanjari*, *Zalar*, *Shankh*, *Manjira*, *Flute*, *Bhungal*, and *Shehnai*<sup>1</sup>.

#### **Folk play - Bhavai**

*Bhavai*, a popular folk play form of North Gujarat and parts of Kathiawar is the oldest of the traditions (1361 AD). There are 365 *Vesh* (episodes) that could be performed each night of the year. But not more than 50-60 of these *Veshs* have survived today. The subject matter has *satire*, *pun*, *rebuke* and comic *repartee*. The feelings, emotions and aspirations of folk life find expression in a *bhavai*. It has *duhas*, *ontha*, *jodakana*, etc. between singings and playing to provide moral lessons. Folk dances and folk music were also used in presentation of *bhavai*. It educates the common masses. Person playing a role in a *bhavai* is called a *bhavaya*. *Bhavai* in some extent is losing popularity. Today, *Bhavai* has nothing new to offer, but if it is coordinated properly and necessary orientation is given, it could regain its popularity<sup>1</sup>.

#### **Strategies for protection and preservation**

Due to globalization and uses of remixes the dance forms has lost its charm and originality. To awake interest in folk literature music and dance, there is a need to encourage youths to know, understand its beauty of words, its grace, and its spiritual importance. The folk artists living on the art are not able to fulfill their financial needs. Government or

private institutes should recommend proper prevention programme of these folk art and literature and special care should be taken of the financial needs of these folk artists. *Raas on dhol* and *shernai* is found no more. Young girls and boys should be encouraged to perform the folk art forms in their original form. Exhibitions and programmes should also be conducted. Use of information technology can also help preserve our folk art and culture. Information about folk culture should be displayed by creating websites that give total information of the folk arts and of particular state/society. Cultural clubs giving information of folk arts should be formed and members in it should be educated about the folk culture and literature and pursue them to prevent our folk arts from extinction.

#### **Conclusion**

Institutes should be developed to promote the folk dance, music and theatre to help youngsters and students to know more about the folk art and literature. Folk artists should be given proper remuneration so that the folk art is kept intact. Parents should encourage their children to learn these renowned folk art. If given proper attention and encouragement there is a lot of scope in the development of folk literature and art in general and of Kathiawar in particular.

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